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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND INR/AA

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SUBJECT: Zanzibar Elections: Worrisome Prospects

Classified by Pol-Econ Chief Judy Buelow for reason
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C) Dar es Salaam 908, D) Dar es Salaam 772

¶11. (C) Summary: The Diplomatic Group convened June 17 to discuss Zanzibar's elections preparations, and to plan its response to troubling recent developments. Earlier in the week, Zanzibar Presidential candidate Seif Shariff Hamad had called on several Western embassies to describe the opposition CUF party's struggles on an uneven playing field. Hamad also said CUF would stage a massive "peoples' power" civil disobedience campaign if the Zanzibar elections were "stolen again." On June 15, the election observation NGO "TEMCO" held a conference for Zanzibar's stakeholders to discuss voter registration, highlighting the many problems that could undermine the credibility of the Permanent Voters Register (PVR) and the elections. On the positive side, Zanzibar President Karume opened TEMCO's Conference and said all the right things about fair elections. Observers concur that the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) still could implement technical measures to resolve the problems with the PVR. It remains to be seen if the ZEC will in fact do so, and if the rest of the Zanzibari government will refrain from interfering during the critical run-up to the October 30 elections. End Summary.

Debate and Contingency Planning

¶12. (U) Voter registration on Zanzibar ended April 26, and the official campaign does not open until August 20. During this interim period, the ZEC is receiving objections to names that may have been wrongly entered on the PVR or wrongly omitted. Together with the courts, the ZEC is adjudicating these cases. Meanwhile, Zanzibar's election "stakeholders" are debating the prospects for credible elections; some are making contingency plans in the event irregularities and violence once again undermine the electoral process.

TEMCO Provided a Forum for Debate . . .

¶13. (U) A June 15 conference on Zanzibar's voter registration, hosted by TEMCO, highlighted both the serious problems with the PVR, and Zanzibar's widening political polarization. TEMCO, the Tanzanian NGO that USAID funded to observe voter registration on Zanzibar, presented TEMCO presented its findings to a cross section of "stakeholders." Conference attendees included Zanzibari government officials, representatives of the CCM and CUF parties and nearly a dozen smaller parties, NGOs and the Diplomatic Group itself.

¶14. (U) In Zanzibar's volatile political atmosphere, the conference was interesting primarily for who attended, and how they reacted to TEMCO's findings and to each other. The most encouraging presentation was the opening statement, delivered by Zanzibar President Karume. Karume's brief and rather bland speech hit all the right notes about the government's support for free and fair elections, and Karume's determination to work with TEMCO, the donors and others to ensure the credibility of the PVR. (Karume's speech might have caused dismay only to the diplomat who had bet a bottle of scotch that the embattled CCM incumbent would never show for the conference.)

¶15. (SBU) Karume departed soon after the opening, but he left his Minister for Women's Affairs, and several CCM party stalwarts to deliver the CCM hard line in the discussion sessions. Predictably, they lambasted TEMCO and questioned the NGO's neutrality

in Zanzibar's electoral contest. Representatives of several of the smaller opposition parties spoke passionately, and at great length, to denounce the bipartisan Muafaka Accord signed between the CCM and the CUF. It was clear that the other opposition parties still resent their exclusion from the Muafaka negotiations in 2001; about the permanent voters register and other reforms mandated under the Muafaka they had little to say. As the target of most of the criticism about voter registration, the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) kept a low profile. The ZEC was represented only by its information officer, who did not speak during the day. One of the TEMCO observers, however, told the diplomats privately that TEMCO and the ZEC commissioners regularly exchanged views. One Commissioner had even told her he was grateful to TEMCO for saying what the ZEC could not say in public.

. . . and Noted Problems with Voter Registration

16. (U) In their presentations, several TEMCO observers delivered hard-hitting criticisms of the voter registration process. These came as little surprise to the diplomatic group whose members had also observed voter registration in the field. TEMCO observers cited the following problems, also reported extensively in reftels:

-- Excessively high levels of voter registration in some constituencies, in some cases exceeding 200 percent of the expected turnout.

-- Evidence that the government sent members of the irregular security forces to register en masse in certain constituencies.

-- Widespread interference with registration by government-appointed village headmen ("shehas"), in contravention of electoral law and ZEC procedure.

-- Numerous cases in which shehas selectively denied individuals access to the registration centers. In contravention of ZEC procedures, many of these individual were not allowed to document or to appeal their denial.

-- Strong social and familial pressure led many individuals to register even when they were underage or otherwise ineligible.

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The CUF Party Lists Complaints about the Process . . .

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7.(C) The opposition CUF party, which stands a good chance of winning Zanzibar's elections, did not send its top officials to TEMCO's conference. Instead, Seif Sharif Hamad, the CUF's candidate for President of Zanzibar, made the rounds of Western embassies in Dar es Salaam the week of June 13 -17 to outline the CUF's concerns about the PVR and other elections preparations. (Hamad met with US Emboff June 14.) In addition to the well-known problems with the voters register, Hamad listed the following concerns:

--Hamad has publicly stated that he would concede should he lose a free and fair election. Incumbent President Karume has yet to make such a commitment.

-- The ruling CCM, contrary to the spirit of the Muafaka, refuses to talk with CUF. It took months of effort for the CUF to schedule a June 11 meeting between the Secretaries General of the two parties. The CCM canceled it, however, after a murky incident in which CUF militants reportedly stoned the home of CCM Presidential candidate Jakaya Kikwete.

-- Zanzibar's security forces, assisted by police from the Mainland, were clamping down on the opposition. Hamad claimed that "Operation Dondola" continued, resulting in the arrest of 270 CUF supporters but nobody from the CCM. (Reftel B)

-- The government has launched a crash program to issue an ID card to each Zanzibari by September. While the new ID cards are not a requirement for voting, Hamad worried that on election day, the police would check ID cards as a pretext to prevent

CUF supporters from moving freely to the polling places.

-- The Zanzibari Government is paying \$5 million dollars for the ID cards, but is slow to provide basic operating funds to the ZEC.

. . . and Plans a Peoples Power Campaign

18. (C) Hamad informed his diplomatic interlocutors that if the CCM again manipulated the Zanzibar elections to keep its hold on power, the CUF would take to the streets in a "Ukrainian-style People's Power campaign." The CUF would stage massive, but non-violent, demonstrations on Zanzibar and in selected mainland cities. Hamad said speakers at CUF rallies were already instructing party activists on tactics for non-violent protest and "avoiding police provocations." Several diplomats challenged the CUF to list positive steps that can be taken now to help ensure the credibility of the October elections. Hamad's to-do list included:

-- ZEC should publish the preliminary voter registration lists for Unguja Island and begin the objections process there. (Administrative problems have delayed the posting of the lists until the first week of July.)

-- ZEC should contract with the South African company Waymark for the purchase of software to detect duplicate images (thumbprints and photographs) in the PVR's computer database.

-- Foreign Embassies should issue a public statement of standards for free and fair elections on Zanzibar. In response to emboff's questions, Hamad said that these standards could draw on Zanzibar's own Electoral Law, or on the SADC election standards, which the Tanzanian government has already accepted.

The Diplomatic Group Contemplates Next Steps . . .

19. (C) TEMCO's conference and the CUF's demarches highlighted serious problems that could undermine the credibility of the PVR, and ultimately Zanzibar's elections. The week's events also revealed Zanzibar's growing political polarization, foreshadowing a conflictive campaign season. Despite these grim developments the Diplomatic Group, and we, are determined not to give up on Zanzibar just yet. For now, the diplomats are urging fractious Zanzibaris to take concrete steps to re-establish dialogue, reduce tensions and resolve problems with the PVR. When Seif Sharif Hamad made the rounds of Western embassies, several of his interlocutors urged him to approach the missions of democratic African countries as well, to show that democratic principles are universal, and not exclusively Western. At the TEMCO Conference, several of the diplomats in attendance encouraged TEMCO director Dr. Rwekaza Mukandala to emphasize the ZEC's role in "scrubbing" the PVR, lest the whole conference become an exercise in fruitless "ZEC bashing."

. . . Recalibrating the Diplomatic Message

10. (C) In their June 17 meeting, Heads of Mission in the Diplomatic Group decided to stay the course for now. The diplomats will continue to meet with Zanzibari and Tanzanian political leaders and to reiterate their six-point message in support of a credible voters register and a peaceful election. The UK High Commissioner suggested nonetheless that the Diplomatic Group make contingency plans to increase the political pressure if circumstances warranted it. He suggested that the Diplomatic Group draft a joint statement, which could be signed by the Heads of Mission and released publicly in the event of an upsurge of political conflict, or of apparent government interference with preparations for the elections. Some diplomats also suggested staging a joint consular visit to the isles in August, to assess the security situation during the run-up to the elections, and to consider possible coordination on travel advisories to their nationals. Many thought that a relatively high profile assessment of Zanzibar's security might also

remind the Zanzibar government that another conflictive election could undermine Zanzibar's all-important tourism sector.

.. .and Emphasizing Practical Fixes

¶11. (C) The Diplomatic Group is also contemplating immediate steps to resolve problems with the PVR and build its credibility. Donors from the nine-member Muafaka Basket are identifying funds to purchase new software from Waymark which would detect duplicate thumbprints and photographs in the PVR. Waymark, the company that provided equipment and technical support to establish the PVR, had been working on a feasibility study for the software last May, when the ZEC abruptly broke off contract negotiations. Reportedly, Waymark's feasibility study revealed that up to 6 percent of the records in the PVR were duplicates; this closely held and potentially explosive information might have been a factor in the ZEC's sudden reluctance to obtain the software. While the ZEC now indicates that it will sign a contract with Waymark, the donors worry that any further delay could cost the ZEC the opportunity to eliminate dual registrations from the PVR.

¶12. (C) The diplomats are also urging the ZEC to reopen voter registration in order to accommodate those Zanzibaris, perhaps numbering several thousand, who were previously denied access to the registration centers. The ZEC has the legal authority to reopen registration, although it remains to be seen if the ZEC can better control the shehas during a second round of registration, and prevent them from again unilaterally blocking access to the centers, in contravention of the established voter registration procedures.

¶13. (C) Comment: We have not lost hope for free, fair and peaceful elections on Zanzibar, although some of these recent developments do not bode well. The ZEC still has sufficient time, technical expertise, legal authority, and donor assistance to resolve many of the problems with the PVR. Although the Zanzibar government has a record of interfering with voter registration and sometimes undermining the ZEC's authority, President Karume still publicly proclaims his support for fair elections and unbiased electoral assistance. Finally, an active, committed Diplomatic Group is in a position to assist the ZEC with technical solutions, and to apply diplomatic pressure to hold President Karume to his word. End comment.

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